

Lithuania: A Look at the 'Large Picture'

It is outrageous that the administration's laissez-faire attitude on Lithuania is qualified as "disciplined" by a senior administration official ["White House Tones Down Its Comments," front page, March 28]. It is even more appalling to learn that, according to this official, our president is trying to look "at the very, very large picture here. We don't want to exacerbate what is already a very, very serious problem for Gorbachev."

In 1939 two leaders, Hitler and Stalin, envisaged Europe as two large spheres of influence—one for each of them—which precipitated World War II and doomed independent, neutral Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to forcible annexation by the Soviet Union.

President Bush can help Mikhail Gorbachev with his problems by suggesting that now is an opportune time to correct Stalin's mistake and that the three independent and neutral Baltic countries can only have an enormous stabilizing effect on the Soviet Union. Is there no one who can convincingly explain this to our president?

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Regarding the recent assault by Sovi-

et paratroopers on unarmed Lithuanian "deserters" under Red Cross protection in a Vilnius hospital, an important distinction should be made by the news media and our government (particularly, Vice President Quayle). Specifically, these young Lithuanians are not deserters but conscripts, forced to serve against their will in an occupying army, which is clearly contrary to international law. These minority conscripts are required to speak the Russian language, to serve in units stationed far from their homeland and are subjected to discrimination, harassment and mistreatment.

Since Lithuania (as well as Latvia and Estonia) was forcibly and illegally incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940 as part of the infamous pact between Hitler and Stalin, neither the Soviet government nor its laws have legal jurisdiction within the Baltic states.

Desertion is a serious crime, and the word "deserter" has a rightfully negative connotation. However, let us refrain from applying it to a situation that does not warrant such a description.

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